

Kum and Go Headquarters Design

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We don't know what Kum & Go's new \$92 million headquarters will look like, but it's becoming clear that CEO Kyle Krause wants to create a downtown Des Moines landmark.

The convenience store chain recently disclosed the six architecture firms competing to design the building. The firms' resumes include the world's tallest building, eye-catching art installations and Kansas City's new performing arts center.

"It's a very serious list," said Tom Leslie, an Iowa State University professor of architecture. "These are absolutely top firms, some of the top firms in the world."

Kum & Go "did their homework and wants to do something big," he said.

Here's a look at the architecture firms and their work:

Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG) is known as much for designing pop-up events and art installations as buildings. The firm focuses on designing active and interesting space. BIG's work includes the "8 House" in Copenhagen, Denmark, which stacks a neighborhood into a figure-eight-shaped development.

Bohlin Cywinski Jackson designs "thoughtful buildings" that don't necessarily jump out at you "but contribute to making good places," Leslie said. The firm has designed university buildings, Seattle's city hall and several of Apple's all-glass flagship stores.

GatesHall1.jpg

The Bill and Melinda Gates Hall at Cornell University. (Photo: Cornell University/Special to the Register)

Morphosis designs buildings with "aggressive" and "intentionally jarring architectural forms," Leslie said. Its buildings can be sculptural while still fitting into a city. The firm's projects include the San Francisco Federal Building and the Bill and Melinda Gates Hall at Cornell University.

Renzo Piano Building Workshops designs very high-tech architecture and is known to use natural light and ventilation. The firm designed the New York Times building, the 76-story London Bridge Tower, the Modern Wing of the Art Institute of Chicago and the California Academy of Sciences.

Safdie Architects focuses on building cities and urban spaces. Its designs include bold, signature buildings, like the new Kauffman Performing Arts Center in Kansas City, Mo., as well as more understated buildings that fit into a cityscape.

BurjKhalifa.jpg

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP designed the Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world. (Photo: Scott Olson/Getty Images)

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP (SOM) is known for its skyscrapers — though don't hold your breath for a high-rise from Kum & Go. Krause has said he envisions a building that will fit in among the four- and five-story offices in the Western Gateway. The firm designed the tallest building in the world: Burj Khalifa, a 2,700-foot-tall tower in Dubai. It also designed the Willis Tower in Chicago and One World Trade Center in New York. Beyond skyscrapers, SOM has a long record of urban designs that create active streets, Leslie said.

Kum & Go plans to pick an architect by mid-November and will select a local architect and general contractor to partner on the project by the end of the year, said company spokesperson Traci Rodemeyer.

The company announced plans earlier this year to leave its West Des Moines headquarters and build a new 120,000-square-foot corporate office on the north side of the Pappajohn Sculpture Park, between 14th and 15th streets. Some had said the move reflects Krause's affinity for downtown; he is personally invested in several buildings around the sculpture park.

What shape should Kum & Go's new headquarters take?

Perhaps no one is more appropriate to address that question than Mario Gandelsonas, the New York architect who helped create the vision for the Western Gateway and the Pappajohn Sculpture Park.

Gandelsonas has been in contact with Krause about the project, but said he is not picking favorites among the firms. He said Kum & Go's building should be distinct but should not distract from the sculpture park.

"The buildings surrounding the Pappajohn park should work as a wonderful frame," he said. "I don't think it would be appropriate to have something overwhelming ... It would have to be a special building, but on the other hand it would have to be restrained."

Cal Lewis, a professor of architecture at Iowa State University, has been involved in the design of several downtown buildings. He agreed it will be important for Kum & Go to frame the sculpture park like the other offices built along Grand Avenue and Locust Street.

"One very important thing will be to maintain that urban edge," he said. "The park needs an edge. The park needs to have definition. It's probably not time for an object building facing the park."

Local architects said the prospect of a new downtown building designed by an internationally known architect is exciting, but not unheard of for Des Moines.

The city has a history of attracting top architects from outside the state, starting with the Iowa Capitol, which was designed by a pair of Chicago architects.

In the 1960s, SOM designed the American Republic building downtown, which is now being renovated.

More recently came the Des Moines Central Library, designed by London-based David Chipperfield.

"Des Moines really punches above its weight class for a city its size," Leslie said. "This city has a great tradition of international-caliber architecture."